

What Do State Association Officers Think About Unity?

Kent Greenawalt

If you have been following this column, you know that I occasionally invite others to express their feelings on chiropractic unity. This time, I went to state association officers and asked them how important they felt unity is to chiropractic. It's evident that this topic is near and dear to many hearts, because the response was overwhelming! Here are some of their thoughts on unity in the profession.

Alabama State Chiropractic Association (ASCA) - Carl E. Nelson, DC

"I am just beginning my second year as president of the ASCA, and in every article I've written for our quarterly newsletter, I've talked about 'unity within diversity.' I feel it is very important for us to present a 'united' front to Congress, state legislatures, business leaders, third-party payors and John Q. Public.

"Until we can do so, we will never achieve the status our profession deserves. We are a diverse group by nature - we always have been and always will be - and there is the potential of great advantage within that diversity, if we can learn to see that we're all chiropractors, even though we may do things differently.

"If we can get past the polarity of 'I'm right and everyone who doesn't agree with me is wrong' and see that there are just different ways of doing things, we can present a united front, but until we can learn to keep our philosophical differences behind closed doors and quit fighting in public, it will never happen. If our national associations can meet and work out an acceptable consensus relative to the different issues that face us - then present that with unity, instead of one group undermining the work another has done - chiropractic can get somewhere."

Colorado Chiropractic Association (CCA) - Richard W. Gringas, DC

(Dr. Gringas sent a report giving goals, objectives, obstacles, strategies and evaluations that are intended for the Colorado Chiropractic Association. While unity isn't mentioned specifically, one of the strategies mentioned was: "Teach and educate chiropractors that the CCA is a big tent of chiropractic ideas and practice methods. Chiropractors should have the freedom to practice how they wish and respect others ideas and methods within the rules and policies of the Colorado Chiropractic Practice Act.")

Florida Chiropractic Association (FCA) - Dr. Ted Hartley, DC (vice president)

"Very important. We need to define what it is that makes the chiropractic profession unique (correcting subluxations) and have this definition accepted by the profession, chiropractic colleges and advertised to the public."

Georgia Chiropractic Association (GCA) - Robert A. Hayden, DC, PhD (president-elect)

"Unity is an attribute that we lack in many respects, and it cripples us on multiple fronts. I am in a state that has been fractured for some time now - but healing is near. The four pillars of our professional community [Life U, the Georgia board, the GCC and the GCA] are all in a state of flux as of this writing.

"The Georgia Board of Chiropractic Examiners is totally new. The new board is very eager to move toward unity in the state as it performs its primary function of protecting the public. Life University is under new, progressive management. It needs to reconnect with its alumni, many of whom are our members. The GCA is under new management. Our new officers are meeting this week to hammer out a five-year plan, in which unity is a motif. The Georgia Chiropractic Council (GCC) is also under new progressive management, and the new president seems as eager as I to make headway in narrowing our gaps.

"The four pillars above met in October for a breakfast conference to discuss what we want to see happen in our state. The mood is hopeful."

North Carolina Chiropractic Association (NCCA) - Christopher Outten, DC

"Your request is very timely, since the theme of the 2003-2004 North Carolina Chiropractic Association is 'unity' within our profession. We, as a profession, have been trained to concentrate on our differences instead of our commonalities. Eighty percent of what goes on in a chiropractor's mind and in his or her practice is very similar.

"What could we accomplish if we could concentrate on our similarities and revel in our differences? As we mature as a profession, we need to stop putting the same old labels on each other and start using such labels as 'friends', 'colleagues', 'brothers' and 'sisters'. What would chiropractic in North Carolina look like if we had a unified profession?

"This is not about homogenizing the uniqueness of anyone; this is about finding our commonalities, working and going forward together - celebrating what is different, but still honoring each other as colleagues. Our association does not care if you are a straight chiropractor or use modalities, AK, acupuncture, nutrients, etc. We do, however, care if you have an ethical business practice, integrity and provide a loving service to your patients."

Rhode Island - Daniel Becker, DC (North Smithfield practitioner)

"Unity is very important. However, the question is, 'unity among who or what?' We have two unity problems: competing ideologies, always referred to when proposing the question of unity; and the other, unrecognized, which is unity among the components that make up a profession. The second, though, is not a lack of unity based on ideology, but instead a lack of unity based on a lack of definition of purpose as it relates to the goals and mission of the profession.

"Unity concerning ideology is not important. In fact, it is unrealistic and unobtainable other than in an environment where all ideologies are protected, as in a country that has established a government based on democratic theories. Even in such a structure, there is not unity, only agreement as to the method used to avoid physical destruction of people and assets - namely a vote. Even then, there has to be agreement on the core concepts of purpose and meaning. We are not a country, but a business

using the model of structure referred to as a profession. A country has completely different purposes for existence than a business.

"The reality of the solution is seen in history everywhere. Unity of ideology is achieved by the ultimate annihilation of one of the competing ideologies. This is done via physical acts of war, or by providing a purpose and meaning that encompasses the greater number of people's own purpose and meaning. This causes a mass movement over time, and one ideological becomes so weak that its influence on the masses is negligent to nonexistent. WWII is the example of ideology unity through war, as it relates to government and country. [Abraham] Flexnor [whose 1910 report, "Medical Education in the United States and Canada," hastened much-needed reforms in the standards, organization and curriculums of American medical schools] is the example of ideological unity by war in a profession. Unfortunately, we do not have the option of war via a Flexnor model (that is, an outside force resulting in a singular ideology) because we [do not face] the immediate cessation of death as it relates to a country dealing with physical war.

"Without both issues of unity being resolved, we will not prosper as a business. Unity based on the competing ideologies is unimportant. All we must do is pick one and work to eliminate the other as a competing entity within the sub-marketplace of chiropractic medicine. Unity of components of the profession is very important, because this will allow the success of elimination of the competing ideology, ultimately allowing the profession to be an effective competing ideology in the primary marketplace of society's health and healing."

South Carolina Chiropractic Association (SCCA) - Evan M. Cohen, DC (president)

"Unity is, by far, the most important issue we have facing us today in chiropractic. That hasn't changed for many years, but it has become more important because of all the surrounding forces trying to do us damage and harm. The only way we can fend off these forces - whether they be a bad economy or insurance companies trying to diminish coverage - is to have a single expression of chiropractic to people outside of the profession.

"If we speak with one voice, we are so much stronger than if we are speaking in many voices. Dr. Jerry Hardee (president of Sherman College of Straight Chiropractic) also sees that the answer to the future is a single voice.

"Unity has to start at the state level, first. The biggest problem that you have, legislatively, is having more than one opinion - some states even have more than one association. It gets confusing when you have different lobbyists saying different things to the legislators. Everyone needs to be saying the same message."

Tennessee Chiropractic Association (TCA) - Michael D. Massey, DC, CCSP (president)

"It is my belief that unity of our profession is vital to the furtherance of it. Far too much effort remains spent on internal conflicts, ego exercises, and philosophical clashes, when, in the end, we are all chiropractors and should be able to speak with one voice as a profession. Without some semblance of unity, we will continue to appear disorganized and dysfunctional to the health care consumer; the media; other health care practitioners; and legislative bodies. We have been both skillful and fortunate that we have come as far as we have under the current circumstances we find ourselves in as a profession. Imagine what might have already been [accomplished] if we'd been able to gain consensus and move forward on targeted initiatives as a unit."

Virginia Chiropractic Association (VCA) - Larry Stine, DC, FACO

"*Webster's New World Dictionary* defines unity as 'a whole that is a union of related parts; an arrangement of parts in a work of art or literature, that will produce a single effect; steadiness of purpose; action, etc.' This is not to say that unity must be in complete unanimous agreement. Unity is a way of gathering a group of related parts in order to assert a more powerful, knowledgeable image or progress more succinctly. One voice; one strong state or national association, would bring about more of the types of benefits each individual member of that unity needs to thrive; steady progression for all members of that unity; and greater productivity.

"Applying the principles of unity to the chiropractic profession would suggest that change comes from within. Forming or joining a whole for the sake of protecting the rights of all members of that unity is the democratic process that works best. The rights of the minority to voice their individual opinions is protected, while the union understands that majority rules.

"I feel that unity would be very advantageous to both the state and national chiropractic associations in that it would produce a stronger effort in lobbyists, lawyers, and paid assistance that would give our opinions more of a voice within the established system that the general public accepts. The division of the associations gives rise to excuses to not join any association, and hurts the impact of the association's ability to move forward."

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